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Air India clips COO, CTO's wings

By Manisha Singhal, ET Bureau Last Updated: Feb 15, 2011, 05:41 AM IST

Synopsis

Air India has watered down the powers of its expat chief operating officer and chief training officer.

MUMBAI: State carrier Air **India** has watered down the powers of its expat chief operating officer and chief training officer three days after sacking its low-cost subsidiary **COO** Pawan Arora, toeing the line taken by the new civil aviation minister who wants to take a re-look at expensive recruitments.

While the airline has asked its chief operating officer (COO) Gustav Baldauf not to travel abroad for any negotiations on behalf of Air India, it has decided to put the process of issuing foreign aircrew temporary authorisation (**FATA**) to its chief operating training officer Stephan Sukumar on hold, according to three independent people close to Air India.

Foreign pilots are allowed to fly and train in India under FATA issued by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. Arvind Jadhav, chairman and managing director of Air India, recruited the expats and these appointments were ratified by the board in June and September 2010, respectively.

These top recruitments ran into controversy as Baldauf and Sukumar were given expensive salaries of over Rs 3 crore and Rs 1.5 crore, respectively. Restrictions on Baldauf's foreign travel will put a spoke in Air India's entry into Star Alliance. This former Canadian airline executive was mainly brought in last year to ramp up Air India's global operations. "Whatever political decisions are there to be taken, will be taken.

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But at the moment I am not worried of these things as the turnaround of the airline is more important and for me, the time is running out both for stopping the slipping airline into bankruptcy and also for the airline joining the Star alliance which is coming to its deadline by June this year,” said Baldauf.

Sukumar could not be contacted. However, people close to him told ET that he was finding it extremely difficult to take things forward. He was brought in to ramp up training to fill in for the shortage of cabin crew and cockpit staff. DGCA, the civil aviation regulator, has raised objections to some papers submitted for Sukumar’s appointment.

The airline, struggling to pay salaries for employees, will have to pay hefty amounts to expats if they are given the marching orders. “If they want to remove Sukumar, they will have to pay a sixmonth salary,” said an Air India official.

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